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ABSTRACT

To highlight the versatility of the Starter Approach to reading, a one-on-one beginning reading strategy for use with a nonreader of any age, this document describes the approach in detail and then briefly describes four longitudinal studies that used it. The introduction notes that the procedure combines successful components of popular, innovative reading strategies such as the language experience approach, echo reading, and repeated readings in a multi-modality reading technique. The next section outlines the six-step Starter Approach, which proceeds in the following sequence: (1) the student dictates a story to a teacher or literacy volunteer; (2) the teacher reads the student text aloud, tracking while the student listens and follows along; (3) the teacher and the student orally read the text together; (4) the student reads the text orally; (5) sight words from the student text which are recognized in isolation are filed in a word bank; (6) the teacher and student review previous stories and word bank terms. The next section of the document discusses transfer from dictated language experience stories to published reading materials, showing how steps 2-4 of the Starter Approach can be adopted to these readings. The document's final section describes the results of applying the Starter Approach in four diverse instructional settings; first, with a fourth grade nonreader; second, with a kindergarten class; third, with an adult nonreader; and fourth, with a second grade nonreader. The conclusion reiterates the strengths of the approach: unison oral reading, use of repeated reading, emphasis on building a strong sight word vocabulary, and ease of implementation. (SKC)

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FOUR LONGITUDINAL STUDIES OF THE STARTER APPROACH, A BEGINNING READING STRATEGY FOR NONREADERS

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FOUR LONGITUDINAL STUDIES OF THE STARTER APPROACH, A BEGINNING READING STRATEGY FOR NONREADERS

Introduction

It is common to encounter students of all ages from first grade through adulthood experiencing problems learning to read after an initial year or even numerous years of structured, traditional reading instruction. The Starter Approach, aptly named, is a one-on-one, beginning reading strategy designed for use with a nonreader of any age. It combines successful components of popular, innovative reading strategies such as the language experience approach (Allen, 1976; Stauffer, 1980), echo reading (Heckelman, 1976), and the method of repeated readings (Samuels, 1979) in an individualized, six-step, multi-modality beginning reading technique.

The Six-Step Procedure

Step one: The student dictates a story.

The nonreader can dictate a story to the classroom teacher or to a student or parent volunteer. Initially, a dictated story should be limited to a manageable unit consisting of a simple title and a single sentence.

The language experience introductory activity has several advantages which contribute immensely to the nonreader's immediate feelings of success with the Starter Approach. For instance, motivation and interest are inherent in a reading endeavor in which the introductory, student text is based upon an individual subject's own unique language--vocabulary and sentence structure. A nonreader has probably

been exposed already, unsuccessfully, to traditional, basal reader instructional procedures; thus, a technique such as the Starter Approach, which deviates considerably from any previously employed reading methods, will be more positively received by a remedial reader.

Step two: The teacher reads the student text aloud tracking while the student listens and follows along.

During the second step of the Starter Approach, the nonreader hears his own ideas expressed in his own words as they are read fluently and with expression by the teacher or volunteer. The beginning reader is aware of each word as it is pronounced through the tracking component and may even, for the first time, grasp the concept of what a word is. As the teacher or volunteer reads repeatedly the student text, the nonreader, through listening and following attentively, becomes familiar with his own story to a point nearing memorization.

Step three: The teacher and the student orally read the text together.

During the first unison, oral reading, the teacher may read slightly louder and faster than the student while tracking. But as the student gains confidence with each repeated unison reading, the teacher may soon let the pupil assume the lead. The choral reading step should be repeated until the student is obviously able to read the material successfully alone.

Step four: The student reads the text orally.

The student may track as he reads the text orally if the concept of a word is still not firmly established or if attention to individual words is deemed either necessary or preferable; otherwise, the student reads orally without finger pointing. Again, the repeated oral reading of the same story by a beginning reader ensures growth in word recognition accuracy, reading rate and fluency, and comprehension.

Step five: Sight words from the student text recognized in isolation are filed in a word bank.

Step five of the Starter Approach is an optional step requiring the student to first correctly identify story words presented in a sequential, vertical listing and then as they are referred to randomly in isolation. The emphasis of this step is upon building a basic sight word vocabulary which encourages the transfer of known sight words learned via the language experience component of the Starter Approach to later dictated stories and/or commercial materials.

The teacher initiates step five of the Starter Approach by listing all the words from the student's story sequentially in a vertical column, beginning with the title. The student is told that if a word is not known or is incorrectly identified, it will be eliminated from the list by a single, horizontal line as the purpose of this step is to add those words to a student's personalized word bank, a file box of known story words recorded individually on 3 x 5

index cards, which can be identified accurately and quickly. Words which are either unknown or mispronounced and eliminated from the list will probably reappear in future stories and will be recognized in time. The immediate concern of step five is on the student's sight word recognition of current story words.

With instruction and rationale thus provided, the student is asked to read down the sequential column of words as the teacher points beside each term. A nonreader usually can identify the words from his well practiced story when they are presented initially in the sequential listing if enough rereading occurred during steps 2-4 of the Starter Approach. However, the identification of terms not eliminated during this initial, sequential reading are next presented in a mixed, randomized fashion which becomes a much more demanding task for the nonreader. All words successfully identified on the sequential list are next administered three times in a mixed order with the teacher pointing to the side of a word chosen at random directing the student to pronounce the term. If a word is correctly identified, a small pencilled dot is made next to it. Again, if a word is unknown or incorrectly identified, it is eliminated from the list by a single horizontal line. When all words have been either correctly identified three times, indicated by the small dots, or eliminated, indicated by a horizontal line, the teacher records each word on an unlined

index card to be filed in the student's personalized word bank. A word is filed in a student's word bank only once; thus, the need to duplicate story terms and/or record words already deposited in the word bank is eliminated.

Step six: Review the previous stories and word bank terms.

Teachers of kindergarteners and first-grade youngsters know how quickly children forget what has supposedly been mastered and how much a beginning reader can regress over a long summer or vacation period. Unfortunately, the immediate transfer of learning from short-term memory to long-term memory for a beginning reader of any age is not guaranteed; thus, review of as many previously completed language experience stories and word cards as time permits should always conclude a Starter Approach session.

Transfer from Dictated Language Experience Stories to Commercialized Reading Materials

After the six-step Starter Approach has been repeated such that the beginning reader has dictated and can read error free and fluently 15-25 stories and has stored in his word bank many known sight words, the teacher or volunteer may begin utilizing easy-to-read, commercial materials, adjusting the original six-step, repeated reading process to just complete steps 2-4 of the Starter Approach without repeated readings.

Employing the Starter Approach with commercial materials should first be done on a page by page basis, but eventually steps 2-4 will be completed singly with a complete story.

Again, the Starter Approach is meant to serve only as a beginning reading strategy; therefore, it can and should be terminated once a student has successfully completed first-grade level reading materials.

Successful Applications of the Starter Approach in Four Diverse Instructional Settings

Results of the Starter Approach, applied in four diverse, instructional settings with nonreaders varying in age will next be presented.

A Longitudinal Study of the Use of the Starter Approach with a Fourth-Grade Nonreader

The Starter Approach was used with a fourth-grade boy who was frustrated on preprimer materials and recognized very few sight words. The youngster had been enrolled throughout the primary grades in a special education program which used a strong phonic basal reading approach to reading remediation --obviously unsuccessfully.

At the conclusion of a year of two weekly hour sessions of the Starter Approach, the student scored on the instructional level on the third-grade oral reading passage of the Ekwall Reading Inventory (1986) and on the independent level on the fourth-grade silent reading passage of the same informal inventory. The fourth grader could also correctly identify 283 of the 299 sight words or 95% of the Ekwall Basic Sight Word List and scored at the instructional level on the fourth-grade words of the San Diego Quick Assessment List.

A Longitudinal Study of the Use of the Starter Approach with a Kindergartener Class

Twenty-nine students in a kindergarten class were given three individualized Starter Approach sessions weekly over a ten-week period spanning from October through December via the assistance of fifth-grade and parent volunteers who served as tutors administering the Starter Approach as a supplement to a streamlined version of the Open Court Basal Reading Program (1985) (Randolph, 1987). Pre-and post-test performance of these kindergarten children on subsections of the Ekwall Reading Inventory (1986) were compared to scores obtained by a second, kindergarten class serving as a control group and receiving the full Open Court Program (1985) minus the Starter Approach supplement. Both kindergarten classes were taught by the same instructor.

Results on the Ekwall Basic Sight Word List (Table 1) revealed that, though students in both groups began with approximately equal sight word knowledge and gained in their identification of common sight words over the two-month span, those receiving the streamlined version of Open Court (1985) supplemented by the Starter Approach demonstrated greater overall gains in sight word recognition.

Table 1
Average Sight Word Recognition as Assessed by the Ekwall Basic Sight Word List

Kindergarten Group	Pretest	Posttest	Gain
Traditional Open Court	.7	11.9	11.2
Streamlined Open Court with Starter Approach Supplement	.6	19.6	19.0

All students in the experimental or Starter Approach group dictated 9-13 stories each on various topics of interest. The 29 students exposed to the Starter Approach added a total of 926 words, or an average of 33 words per student to individualized word banks. Actual student word bank entries ranged from a total of 7-72 words. At the end of the two-month Starter Approach supplement, students in the experimental group were tested individually for long term retention of their personalized word bank terms. The 29 kindergarten participants retained an average of 69% of their word bank words over the two-month project period.

Because it is important to consider student attitudes toward beginning reading instruction, an attitude measure was administered to pupils receiving the Starter Approach as a reading supplement in lieu of the complete Open Court Reading Program (1985). Survey items assessing student reactions to various phases of the Starter Approach strategy were presented in a likert scale format with five facial expressions ranging from a low of 1 (expressed by an

extremely unhappy face) to a high of 5 (expressed by an extremely happy face). The children received instruction and practice using the scale prior administration of the attitude measure. The average student response to the 31-item survey was 4.38, a very high reaction to the Starter Approach on a 1-5 scale.

The fifth-grade student and parent tutors were also given an attitude survey at the conclusion of the project, and responded to items concerning the preparation and implementation of the Starter Approach strategy, the kindergarteners' attitudes toward the Starter Approach sessions, and their own reactions as tutors to beginning writing and reading instruction via the Starter Approach. Items were presented in a numerical likert scale format with possible responses ranging from a low of 1 to a high of 5. Table 2 presents the averages of both the fifth-grade and parent volunteer Starter Approach tutors to the three subsections and to the overall survey.

Table 2
Average Likert Scale Responses (1-5) of Fifth-Grade Student and Parent Volun teers Toward the Supplemental Use of the Starter Approach with Kindergarteners

Survey Subsections	Student Tutors	Parent Tutors
Preparation and Implementation of the Starter Approach	4.45	3.91
The Starter Approach to Beginning Writing and Reading	4.36	3.74
The Starter Approach as a Beginning Reading Strategy	4.71	4.01
Overall Group Averages	4.47	3.85

The Longitudinal Study of the Use of the Starter Approach with an Adult Nonreader

The last longitudinal study of the Starter Approach considered its effectiveness as a beginning reading strategy with a 48-year old nonreader.

The adult nonreader experienced immediate success with the Starter Approach despite having unsuccessfully completed numerous night school, university, and adult educational reading programs over the years without learning to recognize the alphabet letters or read even a single word.

Following six weeks of two one-hour weekly Starter Approach sessions, the adult subject had dictated and could read numerous language experience stories, boasted an increased self-confidence, and as a result, moved from initial language experience stories into beginning, commercial reading materials.

A Longitudinal Study of the Use of the Starter Approach with a Second-Grade Nonreader

Initially, the second grade student was unable to recognize alphabet letters, knew no sight words, and had an extremely negative self concept and attitude toward reading By the completion of a year of one-hour sessions held twice weekly utilizing only the Starter Approach, this youngster was functioning instructionally in first-grade, basal reading materials and his self-concept had improved tremendously.

Conclusion

The Starter Approach has numerous strengths: the initial language experience activity, the unison oral reading, the use of repeated reading, and the emphasis on building a strong sight word vocabulary via a word bank. The Starter Approach differs from the traditional Directed Reading Activity (DRA) basal reader instructional format; and thus is favorably received by remedial readers. The Starter Approach has been successfully employed to supplement a whole class, basal reading instructional program and as it was originally conceived, to aid individual nonreaders of varying ages in obtaining beginning reading proficiency.

The Starter Approach has proven simple to implement and is highly recommended for use with a nonreader requiring individualized instruction delivered in a nonthreatening, unique approach with promising results.

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